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Attorney-General's allegations on MI5 man

Bettaney 'tried to set up dead letter boxes'

By Nick Davies

The first MI5 officer to be charged with spying faced 10 charges under the Official Secrets Act at the Old Bailey yesterday in a trial which is to be held almost entirely in camera.

During a 35-minute public hearing before the press and public were excluded the Attorney-General, Sir Michael Havers, said that Michael John Bettaney, aged 34, had decided that he should use his position in MI5 to help the Soviet intelligence service for ideological reasons.

Sir Michael told the jury: "In some cases, I have to tell you that the national interest is so great that I am not going to show you the material, or the court — indeed, I haven't even seen it myself."

"You will appreciate that there are certain matters

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which it simply cannot be in the national interest to pass around, even to me."

Sir Michael said that in the spring and summer of 1983 Mr Bettaney collected a store of highly sensitive information and tried three times to link up with the KGB in London by making midnight visits to the Kensington home of a Soviet official to post introductory letters through his letter box.

In two of the letters Mr Bettaney had given detailed instructions to enable the official, Arkady Vasilyevich Gouk, to pick up the secrets on offer from "dead letter boxes" — one in the cistern of the men's lavatory in a London cinema, the other in an



Michael Bettaney—tried to link up with KGB

empty beer can at the foot of a broken street light.

Mr Bettaney also included with the letters detailed plans for leaving secret messages and samples of secret information — background on the expulsion of three Soviet officials in March 1983 and MI5's Soviet intelligence service activity in London.

These were intended to show Mr Bettaney's bona fides Sir Michael said.

In the first letter, delivered at midnight on April 3, Mr Bettaney told Mr Gouk that if he wanted to accept the offer of information he should place a drawing pin of any colour at the top of the right hand bannister of the stairs leading from platforms three and four of the Piccadilly line at Piccadilly Underground Station.

When the drawing pin was in place Mr Bettaney would go to the Academy One cinema in Oxford Street and strap a cannister full of film of classified information underneath the lid of the cistern in the men's lavatory.

Mr Gouk would know that the cannister was there when

he saw that Mr Bettaney had placed a small strip of blue adhesive tape on the ledge of the middle of five telephone boxes in Adam and Eve Court near Oxford Street.

But, Sir Michael went on, Mr Gouk never left the drawing pin at Piccadilly Station, and Mr Bettaney concluded, as he later told the Special Branch, that "after consultation with the KGB's headquarters in Moscow, a decision had been taken that my offer should not be accepted." So he tried again.

At midnight on June 12, he went again to Mr Gouk's flat at 42 Holland Park and put a second letter through the letter box. This time, Sir Michael said, he asked the Russian to indicate his interest by leaving his car parked on the parking meters on the north side of Hanover Square at lunch-time on July 2 or July 4.

If he did that, the letter had said, Mr Bettaney would leave a cassette of film in an empty Carlsberg lager can at the foot of a lamp post on a footpath running parallel to Horsenden Lane, Greenford. The lamp post had no shade and was leaning to one side.

Mr Gouk would know that the lager can was filled if he saw a drawing pin stuck in the right hand side of the bus timetable at the bus stop on the southern side of Holland Park Avenue.

He could tell Mr Bettaney that he had collected the cassette by leaving some orange peel at the foot of the right hand gate post at the entrance to St James's Gardens, in Melton Street, NW1.

Still, Mr Gouk failed to react, Sir Michael said, and on July 10, Mr Bettaney tried once more although by this

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'Dead letter boxes' plan alleged

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time he was, as he told police later, "noticeably more nervous" and worried that he was under surveillance.

After awlking by the flat several times, he pushed his third letter through the letter box.

Unlike the first two, this contained no sample secrets and no details of dead letter boxes. Sir Michael said that Mr Bettaney simply asked the Russian to expect a phone call at 8.05, 8.15 or 8.25 on the morning of July 15 and to indicate with a pre-arranged form of words whether he accepted Mr Bettaney's offer.

According to the Attorney-

General Mr Bettaney called his home in Victoria Road, three times and got no answer. Coulsdon, Surrey, and shown He concluded that Mr Gouk them the hiding places where had got the letter but had de he was storing sensitive incided or been instructed to formation—some of it on film, ignore the phone as a way of some handwritten or typed making clear his refusal of the from memory.

offer. Still he persisted, Sir Michael said.

Mr Bettaney, who was wearing a blue pin-striped suit and steel-rimmed glasses, denied on September 16 and booked a the 10 charges—six under trip to Vienna on September section one which allege that 19. He had done some research he communicated or recorded or Soviet officials in Vienna in information which might be the hope of contacting them to useful to an enemy, and four pass on secret information, but under section seven alleging on September 16 he was that he took preparatory steps towards communicating secret arrested.

After being questioned for information. three days, Mr Bettaney had. The trial is due to continue taken Special Branch officers to this morning.